

INFANT & TODDLER ORAL HEALTH:

ORAL HABITS

What are oral habits?

Many children develop oral habits. Oral habits can include: thumb or finger sucking, pacifier sucking, and teeth grinding.

Why does my child suck his/her thumb or finger?

Thumb or finger sucking is normal in infants and young children. It provides security and is soothing for your child. Some infants even begin sucking in the womb, before they are born.

When should I start worrying about these habits?

- Your child's pediatrician or dentist will carefully monitor the way your child's teeth come in and how the jaws develop. Usually there is no need to worry until the permanent teeth are ready to erupt, but your child's pediatrician or dentist will inform you if there is cause to worry before that time.
- Most children abandon thumb/finger sucking by the age of 4.

What can I do to help my child break the habit?

Some children need extra help from their parents to break their habit, although most children will stop the habit on their own.

- When your child is old enough to understand that their habit can hurt their teeth, it is a good idea for parents to discuss how to help break the habit.
- Offer a small reward - sometimes this is enough to get your child to break their habit.
- It may be necessary for a dentist to recommend treatment for your child that physically blocks your child from sucking his/her thumb or finger.

Are pacifiers safe for my baby?

- Pacifiers that are made of one piece are safe for your infant to use. Do not let your infant use a pacifier that contains multiple pieces - these may break off and cause a choking hazard for your infant. If you use a string to keep your child's pacifier from falling on the ground, make sure that the string is short enough that your infant will not be strangled.
- Make sure you clean your infant's pacifier daily with soap and water. Replace a worn or damaged pacifier immediately.
- Pacifier sucking past a certain age can also cause problems with how your child's teeth develop. Typically it is easier to break a pacifier habit than a thumb or finger sucking habit.

My child grinds his/her teeth. Should I worry?

- Teeth grinding at night is common among children, and usually occurs between the ages of 5 and 6 years. Research has shown that 1 out of every 3 children grind their teeth at some point. Most children outgrow this habit.
- Your child should see his/her pediatrician or dentist if their grinding habit occurs during the daytime, wears down their teeth, or causes pain.

BRUSHING TIPS FOR CHILDREN

Always use a soft-bristled, child or infant toothbrush.

Replace your child's toothbrush every three months.

Never allow your child to share toothbrushes, it spreads germs.

How to Brush Your Child's Teeth

- Place the toothbrush against the gum line at a 45-degree angle. Use a small circular motion to brush your child's teeth and gums.



- Brush back and forth on the chewing surfaces of your child's teeth holding the brush flat.



- Brush the back of your child's teeth.
- Brush your child's teeth after each feeding or at least two times a day. Be sure to brush at bedtime to remove bacteria that can cause decay while your child is sleeping.



CHECKLIST

See your child's pediatrician or dentist if thumb or finger sucking lasts beyond age 4.

Inspect your child's pacifier daily for signs of damage or excessive wear.

FLOSSING TIPS FOR CHILDREN

Flossing cleans between the teeth where a toothbrush can't reach.

You can begin flossing your child's teeth as soon as any two teeth touch.

How to Floss Your Child's Teeth

- Wrap about 18 inches of floss around the middle fingers. Gently slide the floss between the teeth (don't snap the floss into the gums).



- As the floss reaches the gum line, make a C-shape around the tooth until you feel pressure against your child's tooth.



- Gently scrape the tooth surface with the floss.



- Move the floss as it becomes soiled and repeat the process for each tooth.



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